

## The Last to See Them Alive

- To get the reader in the mood for murder, the book starts with a detailed description of the Kansas flatlands—remote and isolated, lots of boarded-up storefronts and sad cafes.
- You can almost hear that lonesome train whistle...
- We meet Herb Clutter, wealthy Holcomb, Kansas wheat farmer, father of four, and husband to a wife, Bonnie.
- Seems Bonnie's suffered from depression since the birth of her first child and has spent her share of time in psychiatric hospitals. But she just got some news that her depression might be caused by a spine problem, and that with some surgery, she'll be back to normal.
- Everyone's optimistic about her future. **Dramatic irony, anyone?**
- Herb's a decent, respected, prominent guy in town who's done well for himself. His kids are accomplished and popular, and he lives in a huge house he designed himself.
- Despite being well-off, they're unpretentious people.
- Herb doesn't drink alcohol or coffee, doesn't smoke, and most of his friends belong to his Methodist church and are similarly abstinent folk.
- That morning, he goes about his normal routine—milk and an apple for breakfast, and a walk outside to check out the farm and orchards.
- He runs into his hired man, who asks for the day off to take care of his sick baby. Of course, Herb's sympathetic and offers to help.
- A young man named Perry Smith is having breakfast in a café the same morning in Olathe, Kansas, about 400 miles from Holcomb.
- He doesn't drink coffee, either.
- There ends any other similarity with Herb Clutter.
- Perry's waiting for Dick Hickock, his friend and former cellmate from the Kansas State Penitentiary, with whom Perry is supposed to pull off a "score" that night.
- Perry's already planning the escape, to some city in Mexico.
- Uh-oh.
- We learn that Perry has a physical disfigurement—a powerful, muscular upper-body, but misshapen, deformed legs.
- (You've probably noticed that, at this point in the narrative, the author goes back and forth between what's happening in the Clutter home, and what Dick and Perry are up to. This is one of the "novelistic" techniques the author uses to make the narrative more dramatic and interesting. It's not as confusing in the book as it is in our summary, but we'll throw in the occasional "meanwhile" to make it easier to keep on track here.)
- Nancy Clutter talks on the phone to her best friend, Susan Kidwell, about her romance with Bobby Rupp. Her father has problems with this relationship because Bobby is Catholic and the Clutters are Methodist.
- Marriage is out of the question, but Susan advises her to keep dating Bobby until she leaves for college.

- Susan, whose father abandoned her and her mother, was kind of adopted by the Clutter family.
- The call ends when Nancy has to get off the phone to help little Jolene Katz bake a pie.
- Little kids adore Nancy and she's always helping them out with one thing or another.
- Meanwhile, Dick Hickock arrives late to meet Perry. In his car, he's got a shotgun and a hunting knife. He's wearing a hunting vest.
- The hunting vest is to convince Mr. Clutter that they were two hunters who just lost their way and needed to use the phone.
- Dick sneaked the shotgun from his father's house.
- He'd told his father that he and Perry were going on an overnight trip to visit Perry's sister in Fort Scott.
- Think Perry has a sister in Fort Scott? Neither do we.
- The two work together on Dick's black 1949 Chevrolet sedan for hours, making sure the car's in shape for its big trip to Holcomb and back.
- We learn that Dick's living with his parents because that's a condition of his parole. He was married and divorced twice and has three sons, but doesn't live with any of them.
- Nancy and Jolene Katz finish baking the cherry pie. It's heavenly.
- Can it get any more Kansas-y in here?
- Nancy leaves to help with Roxie Lee Smith's trumpet solo, and poor Jolene, who's surely too young for this kind of experience, is left alone with the very depressed Mrs. Clutter.
- Mrs. Clutter talks in an odd way about how her children don't need her.
- She hints that Jolene will end up having the same problems herself one day, and she shows Jolene her collection of miniatures.
- She gives Jolene a miniature paper fan, along with, no doubt, a huge sense of foreshadowing.
- Jolene wishes her mother would hurry up and get there already.
- We learn that Mrs. Clutter had an episode of postpartum depression after each child, and now doesn't function all that well.
- She returns to the bedroom that she doesn't share with Mr. Clutter, and thinks about how hard it is to have to make decisions for the household when Mr. Clutter is away on his frequent business trips.
- She also thinks about the time she watched a party at her home from her bedroom window and was seen by Susan Kidwell's mother. She laments the fact that she'll be remembered by her children "as a kind of a ghost" (1.30).
- Dick and Perry clean up after spending the morning working on the car.
- Dick's face, due to a car accident in 1950, looks "as though his head had been halved like an apple, then put together a fraction off center" (1.94).
- Dick, despite not being all that successful in life, had his IQ tested at 130 while in prison.
- That's really, really high.
- Perry has his own physical deformities: his legs were crushed in a motorcycle accident and never really healed.
- They're twisted and deformed and cause him constant pain.
- He's addicted to aspirin.

- They get in the car and start driving toward Holcomb.
- We learn more about Garden City, the county seat near the Clutter home in Holcomb, and about Mr. Clutter's popularity—he's on a lot of boards and committees, but isn't the snobby type.
- We see evidence of his generosity in his interaction with Mrs. Hideo Ashida, the wife of a Japanese farmer, and her four children.
- Mrs. Ashida, whose family Herb Clutter is giving a ride home from 4H, says to Herb in a fit of ironic foreshadowing that "[she] can't imagine you [Herb Clutter] afraid. No matter what happened, you'd talk yourself out of it" (1.106).
- In Emporia, Kansas, Dick and Perry buy a pair of rubber gloves and enough rope to tie up 12 people, in case the Clutters have company for Thanksgiving.
- Perry wants to buy some black stockings to cover their faces, but Dick thinks that's a waste of money.
- Since they're not leaving any witnesses.
- Meanwhile, Kenyon Clutter has been in the family basement working on a mahogany hope chest, lined with cedar, for his sister Beverly's wedding present.
- Kenyon is more like his mother than Herb, and is thought of generally as being odd but lovable.
- He lately had a falling-out with his best friend, who got a girlfriend and isn't as available to hang out with Kenyon.
- Kenyon runs into the housekeeper's husband, who asks him whose car that is in the driveway.
- Kenyon thinks it must belong to Mr. Johnson, the guy who is selling his father some life insurance. (Cue dramatic music.)
- At that moment, Nancy Clutter comes riding in on her horse, Babe. It's chilly, and Mr. Helm warns her she might catch cold.
- Nancy replies that she's never been sick a day in her life. (More music.)
- See what we mean by this book's being a nonfiction *novel*?
- Perry and Dick park the black Chevrolet outside of a Catholic hospital, where Perry again tries to get Dick to buy black stockings from the nuns who work there, so that they won't have to kill anyone during the robbery.
- Yeah, this is gonna work.
- While Dick's talking to the nuns, we learn Perry's real reason for agreeing to Dick's idea to rob the Clutters: he needed a ride back to Kansas.
- He wants a reunion with his prison friend Willy Jay, a prison chaplain's clerk who, Perry feels, recognizes Perry's true artistic and spiritual worth.
- Willy Jay thought that Perry's explosive temper was what got in the way of his success in life.
- Perry had been living in Idaho when he got Dick's letter about the score. He realized that Willie-Jay was due to be paroled around that same time, so he agreed to go to Kansas with Dick.
- But when Perry reached Kansas City, Willie-Jay had already been released from prison and was gone.
- So Perry decides to continue on with Dick's score.
- Dick comes out of the hospital after a few minutes, telling Perry he asked the nuns, but no go.
- Perry doesn't believe Dick asked, and Perry's right.

- Wow, talk about foreshadowing, dramatic irony, you-name-it: Herb Clutter, on the last day of his life, buys a life insurance policy for forty thousand dollars, with double indemnity.
- That's a life insurance clause that allows for double payment in the case of accidental death, like murder, which is as accidental a death as you can have.
- You couldn't make this up.
- On the way to the store, Perry tells Dick about the easy life and fortunes to be made in Japan and Mexico.
- Dick pretends to be interested.
- Meanwhile, we learn that Bobby Rupp helped the Clutters spend their last night on earth watching TV.
- He's telling this to the person about to administer a lie-detector test to him.
- He says he left around 11pm and shudders to think that there may have been someone waiting there, in the dark.
- Dick and Perry stop for dinner in Great Bend and have a huge meal.
- At a nearby drugstore after dinner, they buy two thick rolls of adhesive tape.
- Rope, tape: obviously, somebody's prepared.
- At a gas station outside Garden City, Dick tells the proprietor that they're passing through on their way to Arizona.
- Just passin' through.
- Perry spends too long in the gas station bathroom rubbing his aching legs.
- Dick wonders if Perry has "blood bubbles" (1.192)—his word for fear—about the plan.
- But he's reassured when he remembers that Perry told him he once beat a black man to death with a bicycle chain. Right.
- Finally, Perry comes out of the bathroom and says, "OK, let's go" (1.209).
- Back in Holcomb, Nancy Clutter's the last of the family to go to bed.
- This is her only alone time—and her last.
- She writes in her diary, says her prayers, and lays out her church clothes—the ones she'll actually be buried in instead.
- The black Chevrolet creeps into the Clutter driveway late that night.
- Cut to around 9am the next morning, when Nancy Ewalt, a classmate of Nancy Clutter, is being dropped off at the Clutter house by her father, Clarence, to go to church with the Clutters.
- No one answers the Clutters' door. They can't be asleep—the Clutters never sleep in on Sundays.
- And all the cars are in the driveway.
- Nice girl that she is, she doesn't want to barge in.
- So she and her father drive to the Teacherage—housing for teachers who can't afford to live anywhere else—where Sue Kidwell and her mother live.
- The Kidwells haven't seen the family either, so everyone heads back to the Clutter house to see what's happened.
- When they walk into the kitchen, they see that nobody has made breakfast, and that Nancy's purse is half-open on the floor.

- Mrs. Kidwell recalls the awful silence as they call out Nancy's name and walk into her bedroom only to discover Nancy's gunshot-blasted, lifeless body on her bed.
- Mr. Ewalt hears the screams and sees the girls running out of the house, crying that Nancy is dead.
- He doesn't know what to think, and runs into the house to call an ambulance.
- The phone lines have been cut.
- Larry Hendricks, Kenyon's teacher and an aspiring writer, lives in the Teacherage with his family. He's there when the hysterical girls and Mrs. Kidwell get back to the Teacherage.
- The sheriff arrives at 9:30 and he heads back with him and Mr. Ewalt to the Clutter farm.
- Once he sees the phone lines have been cut, he knows it can't be good. Luckily for our author, he realizes he should take notes in case he's called to testify.
- He describes the search of the house in detail, and the gruesome discovery of the bound, gagged, and shot bodies of each of the Clutters.
- He's struck most by two details—how Kenyon's head was propped on pillows and how Mr. Clutter's body was resting on a mattress box.
- Holcomb's mail messenger, Mrs. Sadie Truitt, and her daughter, Mrs. Myrtle Clare, the town's postmistress, get the news about two ambulances at the Clutter home. They know it can't be just another one of Bonnie's "spells."
- Myrt tells her mother about the killings; she's horrified and puts her hands over her ears. Myrt is more of a realist, saying that "when your time comes, it comes. And tears won't save you" (1.239).
- News of the murders spreads quickly through the town.
- In Hartman's Café, the owner, Mrs. Bess Hartman, says many people thought at first the murderer was Bonnie Clutter, because of her spells.
- Bob Johnson, the insurance salesman, tries to think of a way out of paying the double indemnity, but ultimately decides it's the right thing to do. He hadn't even deposited Herb's check.
- The two surviving Clutter children, Eveanna Jarchow and Beverly Clutter, are on their way to Garden City as soon as they hear about the tragedy. The rest of the extended family is, too.
- Susan Kidwell fights with her mother to go and tell Bobby Rupp about Nancy's murder, but Bobby already knows.
- On his way home, Mr. Ewalt stopped to talk to Bobby's father Johnny. Afterwards, he told Bobby what had happened.
- Meanwhile, about 400 miles away in Olathe, Perry lies sleeping in a hotel room soaking his bloody boots, while Dick eats supper at his parents' house.
- The killers have left quite a gruesome mess at the Clutter home, and it took four of Herb Clutter's closest friends to clean it up.
- While cleaning up, they learn that Clutters' caretaker, Alfred Stoecklein, who lived less than 100 yards from the Clutter house, had heard nothing the night of the murders thanks to a sick, noisy baby and a howling wind.
- The men put the bloody bedclothes and furniture into a pile and burn them.
- Stoecklein announces plans to move away. He can't imagine staying there any longer.

## Persons Unknown

- The murder case now has the Kansas Bureau of Investigation's finest assigned to it: Alvin Adams Dewey and special agents Harold "Brother" Nye, Roy "Old Man" Church (he's nearly 50) and Clarence "Curly" Duntz (who's almost bald, of course).
- Alvin Dewey is very experienced in these kinds of cases and was a friend of the Clutters.
- This makes it personal to him, and he vows to solve the case if it takes the rest of his life.
- The case is making headlines all over the country, and lots of out-of-town reporters are arriving.
- At his first press conference, Dewey refuses to speculate about the identity of the killer or killers.
- He holes up in his office looking at evidence from the crime scene, including photos of the murdered Clutters. He reads through some of Nancy's diary.
- They give main suspect Bobby Rupp a lie detector test even though no one thinks he had anything to do with it.
- All the possibilities have to be considered—a love triangle, a business deal gone bad, a dispute over a neighbor's dog.
- Robbery doesn't seem to be the motive, since the family's valuables were all in the house.
- Neighbors are now afraid to trust each other. House lights are kept on all night.
- Meanwhile, Perry is annoying Dick nearly to death in Kansas City by endlessly reading newspaper accounts of the murders.
- Perry suspects the investigators have clues, despite what the papers say. He says he has good instincts about it.
- Dick disagrees; it was a perfect score.
- Just to needle him, Perry brings up a name: Floyd. This infuriates Dick, as Perry expected it would. Dick says it would be worth it to go back to jail just to kill Floyd.
- Perry says, "I'm not saying he would" (2.49).
- Perry tells Dick about a recurring dream he has about a yellow parrot that exists only to sweep him away from dangers.
- But Dick only has "normal" dreams—about blondes.
- Susan Kidwell reminisces about her friendship with Nancy Clutter and how she and Bobby were friends for a while—and that he wasn't bitter about being the chief suspect for the murders.
- Susan, Bobby, and Bobby's kid brother were allowed to view the bodies of the Clutter family before the funeral, and Susan wished they hadn't.
- The head of each body was covered in a huge ball of cotton fabric, to hide the fact that there wasn't much left of their heads or faces.
- Perry reads the latest account of the murder in the newspaper, while we wonder whether it makes sense to give publicity to criminals.
- He's impressed that over a thousand people attended the funeral.
- He muses on what a genius Dick really is.



- Dick's gotten them a stake, enough to get the two of them to Mexico, by posing in several stores as the talkative friend of the groom to Perry's glum, silent groom. Together they've written bad checks for a slew of new, easily sellable, stolen goods.
- This gets Perry thinking about what kind of woman he'd want to marry, if he ever did. He remembers a nurse he fooled around with while recuperating from his motorcycle accident.
- In an uncharacteristic moment of guilt, Dick realizes that his parents will be on the hook for the bad checks he's written.
- In an equally uncharacteristic moment of kindness, Perry vows to cover the checks once they've made their money in Mexico.
- Dick doesn't seem to understand—has he been only pretending to go along with Perry's plans for Mexico?
- Officer Dewey's home phone, back in the day when your only choice was a land line, has started to ring in the middle of the night with false confessions to the Clutter murders.
- And yeah, back in the day special agents apparently had their home phone numbers listed.
- This night, having been awakened by another crank caller, Dewey's wife asks if their lives will ever be normal again. Dewey starts to answer her, but the phone rings again.
- The investigators have revisited robbery as the motive for the killing, because they found Kenyon's radio missing. Plus, they found Nancy's gold watch hidden in a shoe, as if she thought there were robbers in the house.
- Dewey's still obsessing about the mattress box and pillows found under Kenyon and Mr. Clutter.
- Meanwhile, the black Chevrolet leaves Kansas on November 21, with Perry's sentimental belongings filling up the car.
- They cross the border into Oklahoma at midnight. Finally, Perry relaxes.
- He has no regrets about leaving Kansas, since he's leaving nobody.
- Dick, on the other hand, is leaving two parents, three sons, and a brother—people he could never hope to see again in this life.
- Back in Holcomb, the news is that Beverly Clutter, one of the Clutter's two surviving daughters, surprises everyone by moving her wedding up to a date when most of the Clutter family is in Kansas—three days after the funeral.
- With the wedding over, the Clutters disperse. Bonnie's brother, Howard Fox, writes a letter to the local paper asking the citizens to forgive the killers. He sees no point in having them hang.
- Perry and Dick park on a promontory to picnic.
- Something's wrong with them, to have done with they did, Perry suggests. Ya think?
- Dick's annoyed, because he considers himself normal, especially compared to Perry, who, Dick has found out, cries in his sleep for his dad, wets his bed, and sucks his thumb.
- Dick wonders silently, like Perry, if the two of them are truly going to get away with the multiple murders.
- Perry reflects on that night at the Clutters'. Sights and sounds come back to him in a weird, disjointed way.

- He can't help but think there's something wrong with him, especially since he had such a miserable childhood.
- With his mother being a drunk who strangled on her own vomit, two of his siblings killing themselves, who wouldn't be messed up?
- Once again Dick insists that he, himself, is normal.
- Then he guns the motor to drive over an old dog and keeps driving.
- (Brief interlude where the reader thinks, "NORMAL????")
- To prove what a tough guy he is, Perry once again tells Dick the story of how he killed the African-American transient, Mr. King.
- This story isn't true, but Perry wants Dick's approval.
- Dick believed this story the first time he heard it, in prison, but he's starting to not believe it now.
- Many people around Holcomb are scared to death after the Clutter murders and are leaving the area.
- Mrs. Ashida and family are one of the bunch, which really disappoints the other locals.
- But Mrs. Ashida can't forget her last, ironically encouraging words to Herb Clutter about his being able to talk his way out of anything.
- But the murderers aren't in Kansas anymore. They've reached Mexico.
- Perry, Dick, a young Mexican man, and Otto, a rich German, are on a small fishing boat in Acapulco while Perry sings.
- Dick had picked up Otto, who enjoyed Dick's jokes.
- But Dick and Perry are out of money, and the plan is to go back to Mexico City and sell the car, after which Dick will get a job in a garage so they can stay afloat.
- Yeah, right—Perry knows that any money Dick makes will be immediately blown on alcohol and women.
- While Dick nurses a migraine and Otto sketches Perry in a notebook that contains many "nude studies" of Dick, Perry hooks a ten-foot sailfish.
- The photograph taken of him next to the fish shows an expression so beatific that it seems as though "a tall yellow bird had hauled him to heaven" (2.150).
- Back on the Clutter farm, on a December afternoon, Paul Helm is pruning and feeling blue about his job and the world in general.
- Herb Clutter had said to him that he hoped there would always be a Clutter on the land, and a Helm, too, but now it looks as though the place will be sold.
- As he's looking up at the empty windows, he sees a hand lift up behind Bonnie Clutter's window and then fall again.
- He phones Sheriff Robinson, who alerts Agent Dewey and his men. They rush over and confront an armed stranger who's emerged from the house.
- The agents remove the stranger's gun and start asking him questions.
- Who is this guy? The man's name is Jonathan Daniel Adrian.
- He's a transient, and was on his way to New Mexico when he got curious about the Clutter murder scene.
- Inside his car, police find a .12 gauge shotgun and a hunting knife, and Adrian instantly becomes a suspect.



- Meanwhile, back in Mexico City, Perry and Dick are out of money; the \$200 they got for Dick's car is gone, and hotel rent is due by 2pm.
- Mexican garage worker wages are too low for Dick's taste, and he decides to go back to the U.S., destroying Perry's dream of finding buried treasure.
- Perry thinks everything will be OK if the pair sticks together; apparently he hasn't read this book.
- Hitchhiking back to the U.S., they'll have to travel light, which means that Perry will have to jettison most of his beloved belongings. He's already upset that his guitar had been stolen during their last night in Acapulco.
- Going through his stuff, deciding what to keep, he reads two letters from his family, one from his father and one from his sister, both of which fill him with love and rage.
- Get ready for a long detour into Perry's early life.
- His father's letter had been written to the Kansas Parole Board on Perry's behalf. It tells about their itinerant life, Perry's mother's alcoholism, and their poverty and homelessness.
- He vouches for Perry's stint in the Merchant Marine and the fact that Perry doesn't like drunks.
- He describes Perry as sensitive. His feelings are easily hurt and he can get real mean if he feels mistreated.
- He's convinced Perry regrets his past mistakes and will be a changed man if he's paroled.
- Evidently, Perry's father hasn't read this book, either.
- The letter brings back a flood of memories for Perry about his early days when he traveled with his parents' rodeo act.
- By the time he was six, his mother was a drunk and left for San Francisco, taking Perry and the other kids with her.
- Perry ran away a lot looking for his father. His mother sent him to live in an orphanage, where he was physically abused by one of the nurses, who hated him because he was half Indian.
- His father came back, and they lived together near Reno, and Perry went to school for a while.
- Then his father built a trailer, and they moved around the country for the next six years, ending up in Alaska. Perry was cold and miserable.
- At sixteen, after a big fight with his father, he went to Seattle, joined the Merchant Marine, and sailed to Hawaii.
- He liked being a sailor except for when he was sexually propositioned by other sailors on the ship.
- He left the Merchant Marine to join the army, and when he finished his service, he reconciled with his father. It was on his way to Alaska, where his father had settled, that he had the motorcycle accident.
- He spent a year in the hospital and rehab, then lived with an Indian logger for the rest of the year.
- Finally, he made it to Alaska, where his father planned to build a hunting lodge for tourists.
- The lodge was a total failure, and his father blamed Perry, which sent Perry back on the road.
- His wanderings took him to Massachusetts, Oklahoma, and Texas, working at odd jobs along the way.
- In July 1955, he was picked up hitchhiking near Phillipsburg, Kansas, by Dick Hickock, who suggested they break into a building and steal office equipment.

- A few days later, they got stopped for running a red light. The traffic cop noticed all the stolen goods in the car and they landed in the town jail.
- They busted out of the jail and eventually went their separate ways. Perry ended up in New York City.
- One day, he was awakened by two FBI agents who extradited him back to Phillipsburg. He was given 5-10 years in the Kansas State Penitentiary.
- End of flashback.
- Oh wait. There were two letters—the other one was from his sister Barbara.
- This letter consisted of reflections on their crazy family and an attempt to make Perry see the error of his ways and take responsibility for his behavior rather than blaming everyone else.
- Barbara accused him of not being a man because he disrespected their father and ended up in prison.
- Perry hates his sister for what she said, and once told Dick that he wished his sister had been in the Clutter home that evening in November.
- The only reason he keeps the letter is because his prison mentor, Willie-Jay, wrote him a long analysis of the letter and of Perry's character.
- (We can see that the Capote is very interested in Perry—this has gone on for 22 pages so far.)
- Perry finishes going through his treasured belongings and papers—his Bronze Star from the Korean War, the high school diploma he earned in prison, photographs of himself, his diary, and a personal dictionary filled with words "worth memorizing" (2.208).
- All the while Perry's been shuffling through his sentimental stuff, Dick has been having sex with a woman in the same hotel room.
- Perry tells them to hurry up and finish—it's check-out time.
- Back in Holcomb, everyone's worried about Agent Dewey.
- He's obsessing constantly about the Clutter case. Some townspeople are harassing him for not finding the killer.
- Agent Dewey goes back to the Clutter house.
- Talk about not having a clue.
- He isn't sure what he's searching for, but he's convinced that the family knew the killer very well, and that the motive was revenge and hatred for Herb Clutter.
- His wife Marie had a dream about Bonnie Clutter: Marie saw Bonnie again, and Bonnie looked beautiful.
- Marie told Bonnie how glad she was to see her again, and Bonnie's response was "To be murdered. No. No. There's nothing worse than that. Nothing. Nothing" (2.189).
- After checking out of the hotel, Perry and Dick are on Route 66 (ask your parents).
- Dick's trying to thumb a ride, trying to look charming and not too much like an iguana, while Perry's sitting on a straw suitcase.
- Their belongings bulge from every pocket; they're still trying to find some nice stranger to strangle and steal his or her car.
- A car slows down, then, seeing the two men up close, speeds by.
- Dick laughs and yells out what a lucky guy he is.

- Perry whips out his harmonica and starts to play their "marching music," *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*.
- Singing loudly, the two head down Route 66 toward their next score.

#### Answer

- Short, chinless Floyd Wells cannot believe his eyes.
- Here he is in the Kansas State Penitentiary, and there in the paper is an account of the Clutter murders—just as Dick described them to Wells.
- Wells had bragged about a safe with a ton of cash in the Clutter place, back when Wells worked for Clutter.
- Wells liked Herb Clutter a lot—he paid good wages and was always willing to front you some money before payday if you were short.
- Dick had badgered him about the Clutter family—were they really rich? How many people lived in the house? How was the house laid out? Where was the safe?
- Dick told Floyd he'd hatched a plan to steal the money in the alleged safe and leave no witnesses.
- Floyd had never believed Dick would do it. People in prison are always bragging about stuff like that.
- Floyd wonders two things: Would he be considered a snitch if he snitched, and what can *he* get out of it.
- Finally he finds his answer: The *Hutchinson News* is offering \$1,000 for news leading to the capture and conviction of the Clutter killers.
- It takes Floyd 10 days to decide it's worth possibly being an accessory to the murder: he calls the prison deputy.
- Floyd's confession reaches Alvin Dewey, who takes mug shots of Dick and Perry home to show the wife.
- She's not pleased. Maybe he should try jewelry next time.
- The parents of Dick Hickock get a visit from Agent Nye, KBI. No relation to Bill Nye, Science Guy.
- Like all cliché parents, Dick's mom and pop defend their boy—sort of: "We love him...oh, I realized. I realized he wouldn't have just packed up. Run off [...] Unless he was in trouble again. What makes him do it? Why?" (3.18)
- Dick's father recounts Dick's childhood. He was doing fine and was a hard worker until his auto accident, when he got a concussion.
- After the accident, "he wasn't the same boy" (3.21).
- Dick's father insists that "That boy has plenty of good inside him" (3.23). But his parents hope they find him.
- Agent Nye, now hot on the trail of Perry and Dick, shows photos of the two to some shopkeepers in Kansas City. Several of them recognize Dick as the writer of the bad checks.
- One of Dick's former employers remembers him as a likable guy and remembers his friend Perry.
- Some neighbors of the Hickocks don't have such great memories of Dick, though. They think he'd "Steal the weights off a dead man's eyes" (3.28).

- Nye returns to interview the Hickocks in more depth. He learns that they could never stand Dick's friend Perry and wouldn't let him in the house.
- They knew Dick met him in prison, and parolees weren't allowed to associate with other ex-cons.
- They recount the events of November 13-15, when their son was, unbeknownst to them, busy murdering the Clutter family.
- They didn't notice anything unusual when Dick got back, except that he was especially hungry and very, very tired.
- We bet.
- Eagle-Eye Agent Nye (sorry, we'll stop, we promise) notices a 12-gauge shotgun leaning against the wall. He's sure it's the murder weapon.
- Cut to the road, where Perry and Dick are still trying to hitch a ride.
- One unlucky guy whom Capote calls "Mr. Bell" picks up Dick and Perry.
- But instead of immediately beating Bell's brains out with a rock Perry has hidden, the pair tell stupid joke after stupid joke, waiting for the perfect time to kill Bell.
- Just as Dick gives Perry the signal to bash in Bell's skull, Bell stops to pick up another hitchhiker, making him one lucky dude indeed.
- Special Agent Nye's investigation takes him to Las Vegas, one of the places Perry Smith was known to have visited.
- He conducts an interview in what he describes in his report as "the lowest type of hotel or rooming house" (3.79).
- The woman who runs the boarding house is 74, but looks, as Nye describes in a rare burst of wit, "younger—maybe ten minutes younger" (3.79).
- Dick and Perry had been her tenants, and she assures Nye his targets will be back: Perry left all his stuff with her, after all.
- The woman shows Nye the box of Perry's belongings. It doesn't yield any useful clues but it tells him a lot about the kind of guy Perry is.
- Nye engages all the local law-enforcement agencies in the search for Dick and Perry.
- The next day, Nye sets out in search of "Texas" John Smith, Perry's father.
- He's told that the elder Smith looks Irish, with thin lips and light skin, dresses like a cowboy, and calls himself the Lone Wolf. Guy has kind of an elevated idea about himself, no?
- At the post office, a clerk tells Nye that Perry stopped by in August, looking for his dad.
- The day after that, the Lone Wolf came in and confirmed that his son had just gotten out of the army and that the two were going to Alaska.
- The post office clerk hadn't seen either Smith since.
- Next up for our lawman is Mrs. Johnson, which is what the narrator insists on calling Perry Smith's sister. Nye interviews her in her middle-class San Francisco home while she's waiting for women friends to come by for cake and cards.
- Mrs. Johnson tells Nye she hasn't seen her brother for four years, that she's afraid of him, and that she wrote to him because she wanted to help him.

- She thinks Perry might be staying with Joe James, an Indian logger who lives in Washington—and that her brother can seem so gentle but don't let that fool you.
- She denies they have a sister in Fort Scott, which had been Dick and Perry's cover story for the night of the murders.
- After Nye and his officer Guthrie leave, Mrs. Johnson settles in for a nice, informative flashback.
- She remembers her early life as the child of Tex Smith and Florence Buckskin, two rodeo performers.
- She recalls her mother's slide into alcoholism, her father's outdoorsman's skills, and the fates that awaited the mismatched pair's four children: the eldest boy a suicide by gun; the oldest girl a suicide by **defenestration** (an awesome word but a terrible way to kill yourself); herself, the exception to the rule; and Perry, a criminal.
- She's three years older than Perry and, as a child, she adored him.
- After he went to live with their father the adoration faded, and he became a stranger to her.
- The last time she saw him, Perry got drunk and pushed her against a wall, yelling that he could have been somebody but that he wasn't allowed to go to school and that's the only thing that held him back from being a brilliant success.
- Sounds like somebody's just a little bitter.
- After Nye leaves, Mrs. Johnson gets up and locks the outside gate against the dead and the living.
- A deluge hits the hitchhikers, who are again on foot.
- They make it into a dark barn.
- Their problem, aside from being mass murderers? They're broke.
- They're down to regarding spearmint gum and Hershey Bars as food groups.
- They're so broke that Dick gets the craziest idea of all—returning to Kansas City, to the scene of the crime, to pass some more bad checks.
- He's convinced that they've committed the perfect crime, and that going back to Kansas is completely safe. Evidently, he hasn't read...never mind, I guess we've worn that one out.
- The two notice a big dark something in the corner of the barn. It's a 1956 Chevrolet with the key in the ignition.
- Meanwhile, Dewey is determined to keep people ignorant of the possible break in the Clutter case, based on the now obsolete idea that the alleged criminals might be innocent.
- He tells the editor of the Garden City *Telegraph* and the manager of local radio station KIUL to keep the lid on things.
- After all, the informant Wells, himself a habitual criminal, might be lying.
- Dewey, however, is privately convinced Dick and Perry are the killers.
- But the only clues he has are a pair of boot prints, one with a diamond pattern and one with a cat's paw design.
- He knows they'll need a confession to solve the crime in the absence of other evidence.
- Dewey believes the killers think they got away with the murders, and he wants to keep them thinking that.
- Dick and Perry are back in Kansas, and Perry is literally sick as he waits for Dick at the Laundromat.

- Dick's late, as usual.
- Maybe he went to see his parents.
- Suddenly Perry can think of a million awful reasons for him to be late this time:
- Dick is being arrested.
- Dick is telling the Kansas police all about Perry and the Clutter murder.
- The Kansas police are heading straight for Perry.
- Perry leaves the Laundromat and vomits on the sidewalk outside.
- Suddenly Dick shows up.
- He'd gone to the Markl Buick Company, where he used to work, and procured a set of Kansas license plates to replace the Idaho tags on the stolen Chevrolet.
- Then he'd gone to a filling station where an old friend named Steve worked, and passed a bad fifty-dollar check to him.
- Dick figures they'll hit a few more places with bad checks that night, then head to Florida.
- Agent Dewey has a bad dream, in which he sees the dead Herb Clutter at a diner along with the killers. He chases the killers to a graveyard and shoots them again and again, but they just disappear.
- He wakes up to a ringing telephone—Agent Nye, telling him that Perry and Dick are in Kansas City in a stolen car with stolen license plates.
- Nye shares the info that Dick is writing bad checks and signing his own name to them all over town. One of the salesmen who took a bad check also took down their license plate number.
- It's the big break both men are waiting for: They're dealing with idiots.
- And yet, the idiots get away to Miami Beach for Christmas.
- To get away from Perry and his endless comparison of every murder in the newspaper to the Clutter murders, Dick takes a walk down to the beach.
- There he contemplates his endless envy, whether it's over the number of seashells another guy has or the number of blondes, until he tries and fails to seduce a girl who's probably twelve.
- Perry, who sees this from a distance, is disgusted. He can't stand it when people have no sexual self-control.
- Perry's contemplating suicide, since he doesn't see that he has a lot left to live for at this point.
- It's Christmas in Garden City, too, and this particular Christmas, Bobby Rupp's family keeps urging him to eat, unable to understand that grief has made him sick.
- He wants no one's company but Sue Kidwell's, and after a month, even that doesn't work. They remind each other of a grief that both want to forget.
- Bobby remembers Mr. Clutter telling the story of being sent on horseback, when he was very young, to buy the family Christmas presents.
- The young Mr. Clutter rode back to the farm in a blizzard, expecting a hero's welcome, but instead got chastised for being a fool for riding in a storm.
- Bobby, on a run, comes unexpectedly up to Mr. Clutter's farm.
- He remembers Mrs. Kidwell saying out of the blue recently that she kept seeing Nancy on Babe, headed towards them.



- On their way to Kansas, Perry insists on giving a ride to two sad characters: a boy dressed in ratty overalls, and an old man who looks near death.
- The old man is the boy's grandfather—they've been on the road trying to reach the town where the old man's sister lives.
- The pair are honest and industrious at a dead-end pursuit: collecting soda-pop bottles for cash.
- They get Dick and Perry involved in the search, which yields about twelve bucks—enough for a good meal.
- They're polite and grateful when Dick and Perry drop them off 100 miles from their destination.
- On December 30, Alvin Dewey's at home when he learns that Perry and Dick have been arrested in Las Vegas.
- He leaves immediately to bring them back to Garden City.
- Flashback to five that afternoon, when Perry goes to the Post Office in Las Vegas to claim a package that he'd sent to himself.
- Dick waits for him outside and thinks of the ways in which he plans to rid himself of Perry.
- Neither one, back in the stolen Chevrolet, notices the police car pulling up alongside them.
- In the Las Vegas County Jail, Dick is interviewed by Nye and Church, while Perry's interrogated by Dewey and Duntz.
- Dick's calm. He's been interrogated before.
- When asked, he proudly lists the shops and restaurants where he's passed bad checks, tells the detectives about his early family life, all routine stuff.
- Then Church says that they wouldn't come all that way after Dick for some bad checks, and Nye adds that Dick and Perry left a living witness at the Clutter house.
- Dick's calm demeanor crumbles.
- Dick says they couldn't have left a witness, which, if you think about it, wasn't a good idea. He's going down, dudes.
- Dewey and Duntz spend three hours interviewing Perry on his life story, then finally get to the events leading up to the Clutter killing.
- Perry sticks to the story of visiting his sister in Fort Scott.
- Duntz tells Perry that, instead of doing the things he claims to have been doing, he was in fact killing the Clutter family.
- He also tells Perry that tomorrow would have been Nancy's seventeenth birthday.
- Dewey then deliberately and abruptly ends the interview to let Perry stew about that info.
- That night, Perry wishes he could talk to Dick, but he knows that the two of them are being kept apart for a reason.
- Dick's positive that the living witness is Floyd Wells, and he wishes he'd silenced Wells when he had the chance.
- Then he thinks about the other living witness, Perry, and suddenly wishes that he'd also silenced Perry in some solitary place.
- He wonders why he never thought of it before. So does the reader.

- Perry ultimately admits the "meeting his sister in Fort Scott" story is just that—a story—something they used with Dick's parents to cover a drinking spree with Perry.
- When Church tells Dick that he'll be charged with four counts of first degree murder, Dick tells him that Perry killed the Clutters. "It was Perry. I couldn't stop him. He killed them all." (3.409)
- In Hartman's Café, Postmistress Clare hears the latest account of the confessions.
- The majority of Holcomb residents believed that the murderers were townspeople, and they refuse to believe that Perry and Dick are actually the killers.
- When a woman in the Café says that she's afraid of the killers, a young farmer says that the killers are now more afraid of the townspeople than the townspeople are of the killers.
- That thing about snakes being more afraid of people than vice versa? It still doesn't ring true.
- Dick and Perry are escorted down the Arizona highway by the KBI agents.
- Dewey drives the lead car with Perry and Duntz, who are trying to wring a confession out of Perry.
- Nothing works until Dewey mentions that Hickock said Perry was a "natural born killer" (3.425) and repeats the story about Perry beating the African-American man to death with a bicycle chain.
- It works. Perry collects himself and begins a detailed description of the Clutter massacre, starting with the letter from Dick telling him about a big score he was planning. We readers are finally witness to the gruesome events of that night.
- Methodically and unemotionally, he describes arriving in Holcomb, entering the house, and systematically tying up and shooting each of the Clutters.
- Their intent, he says, was to rob Herb Clutter's safe.
- He claims that up until the second he did it, he didn't intend to kill Herb Clutter. He thought he was a "very nice gentleman" (3.486).
- Some parts of his account confirm what Dewey suspected—that the mattress box and the pillow were to make the victims more comfortable in some warped kind of way before he blew their heads off.
- Perry says that Dick had planned to rape Nancy Clutter but that he wouldn't allow it. He bets that's something Dick never admitted to the interrogators.
- He says that he spent a few minutes talking with Nancy in her bedroom and that she was trying to be calm and friendly.
- He claims that he killed Herb and Kenyon, and that Dick killed the women.
- Agent Dewey is left to imagine the terrible details of the Clutters' last hours—Nancy begging for mercy, Kenyon paralyzed with fear, Herb fighting for his life, Bonnie tied up in the bathroom hearing the three shots and knowing they'd be coming for her.
- Perry says he wishes he'd killed Dick after they left the Clutter home.
- Dewey is silent on the ride back to Garden City.
- He now knows what happened but can't figure out what would drive someone to commit murder in such an impersonal way.
- After killing four people, Perry and Dick got away with about fifty dollars.
- A pair of cats search the grilles of cars for dead birds (nice touch, Capote) as people collect in the Garden City Square to see the Clutter murderers arrive.

- It's a weird festival atmosphere, full of high school students, newspapermen, hot dog eaters, mothers holding babies, and people shouting Biblical verses.
- But on sighting the murderers, the crowd goes oddly silent, as though surprised to see them "humanly shaped" (3.499).
- As the crowd disperses, the first snow of the year begins to fall.

### The Corner

- The Sheriff's Residence of the Finney County Courthouse is occupied by Undersheriff Wendle Meier and his wife Josephine, "Josie" as she's known by her friends.
- Mrs. Meier takes care of the residence and cooks for the prisoners who reside in the six cells in the courthouse.
- The ladies' cell is located in the residence adjoining the kitchen.
- Perry is the first man to stay in the ladies' cell. The authorities want to keep him separate from Dick.
- Mrs. Meier and Perry become close, and when he won't eat, she offers to make him Spanish rice, which Perry says is his favorite dish.
- Josie tells her husband that she thinks Perry is gentle. Wendle says he wishes Josie could have seen the Clutter place after the murders. She wouldn't have thought so then.
- The omniscient narrator (See our section on "[Narrator Point of View](#)") tells us that Perry spends most of his prison life at the table in his cell, where he eats, keeps a diary, and sketches pictures of the face of Jesus, flowers, and a wild squirrel he's named Red.
- Surely Perry is the most sympathetic mass murderer who ever lived.
- Note that we're still hearing way more about Perry than about Dick.
- Then Dewey takes over the narration: Perry refuses to sign a confession until a detail is changed.
- Earlier, he had said that Dick had killed Nancy and Mrs. Clutter.
- Now, he wants to admit that he killed everybody, out of concern for Dick's mother's feelings.
- The KBI agents go to the Hickocks' home and recover the gun and hunting knife used in the murders.
- The empty cartridge shells, the cord, and the tape are found by Virgil Pietz, a highway county employee who, following directions given by Perry, dug in the location until the objects were uncovered.
- Perry and Dick are assigned lawyers: Arthur Fleming and Harrison Smith.
- The county attorney, Duane West, is seeking the death penalty.
- Dick and Perry are requested to take a lie detector test concerning another murder case in which four members of a family were killed in Florida around the time they were in the area.
- Perry had read about that case in the paper and figured it was a copycat killing of theirs.
- They pass the lie detector test.
- Perry dreams about being back in Alaska with his father, and wakes up having wet the bed.
- During his father's visit to the courthouse, Dick manages to convince him of his innocence. He goes so far as to tell him that he wished he could have shot Perry before he killed the rest of the family. Admirable guy, that Dick.

- Nobody comes to visit Perry—not his father or his sister.
- Perry says he wishes that his sister had been in the Clutter house the night of the murder. Guess he's still angry about the letter.
- Perry is very much alone and misses Dick; Dick's the only other person now in the same boat as him.
- One day, Perry receives a letter and photo from Don Cullivan, who was a friend of Perry's in the army.
- Don not only loves Perry, he loves God, and he wants to help Perry by turning him to repentance and salvation.
- Perry doesn't remember Don, but recognizes the photo and writes back immediately, claiming to remember Don very well. He's grateful for Don's letter.
- Dick's cell has no windows; it faces the corridor.
- To people who observed Dick in his cell at the courthouse, he appeared to be "an unusually untroubled young man" (4.27).
- Dick isn't as untroubled as he seems, though. He spends his time making a shiv to kill Undersheriff Meier and plans to escape to the Colorado mountains.
- He knows he's probably going to hang and figures there's nothing to lose.
- Plus, he has pleasant memories of some time he spent in a cabin the after being thrown out of a truck by a driver who'd picked him up hitchhiking.
- Perry hears that Undersherriff Meier found Dick's shiv during a search of the cells. Dick's not the only one who's been plotting an escape.
- Since he's been in jail, Perry's spotted two men in the courtyard outside his window who seem to be watching him. They come to the courtyard frequently.
- Perry believes that they could be part of a rescue mission for himself and Dick.
- He writes them a note detailing his escape plans, saying that all escape plans must include Dick.
- Although he keeps the note hidden in his cell, he never sees the young men again.
- Now the only way out seems to be suicide, by breaking a light bulb and cutting his wrists with the broken glass and "seeing the yellow bird."
- Giving up on finding a jury of Perry and Dick's peers and a trial venue where the crime isn't known, law enforcement settles for a trial right in Garden City, with a jury who knew the Clutter family.
- Since the accused know that their alleged actions were wrong, they can't use the insanity defense.
- In Kansas, sanity is determined for legal purposes by the M'Naghten rule. It's an ancient British ruling that contends that if the accused knew that what he did was wrong, then he's considered sane and able to stand trial for his actions.
- Three local doctors examined Perry and Dick and concluded that both fit the description of sanity according to M'Naghten.
- Cut to the auction of the Clutter farm equipment, attended by 5,000 townsfolk and overseen by three of Herb's friends.
- The last thing to go is Nancy's beloved horse Babe. Sue Kidwell runs after the animal as it's led away.
- During jury selection, four people claim they had known Mr. Clutter but that it won't make a difference in their verdict. That sounds plausible.

- Almost everyone, including Dick, shows up to the trial in a suit and tie. Dick's parents bought their boy clothes for the occasion.
- Only Perry shows up in a shirt and jeans. He doesn't own a suit and there's no one to supply one for him.
- Both Perry and Dick are asked to write an autobiographical statement for the court psychiatrist.
- Perry's statement is full of hard luck childhood stories, while Dick's greatest hard luck story is having pretty strict parents.
- Dick writes that he always was a hard worker and had gradually worked up to a good job at an auto dealership.
- Oh, and around that time he developed a thing for little girls.
- He admits this was one of the motivations for staying at the Clutter home even after he realized there was no safe there. Unaware that Perry already told this to the KBI agents, Dick admits he had planned to rape Nancy Clutter.
- He thinks that his auto accident was the beginning of his problems.
- After his divorce, he started drinking, and blames his subsequent criminal behavior on that also.
- At the trial, Dick and Perry assume an air of nonchalance, except when Perry sees a man who looks exactly like Herb Clutter.
- It's Herb's brother, Arthur, who's attending the trial to get a good look at the animals who killed his brother.
- On the first day of the trial, Nancy Ewalt and Susan Kidwell testify about what they saw when they entered the Clutter house that terrible morning.
- The jury hears testimony from Clarence Ewalt, Sheriff Earl Robinson, and County Coroner Robert Fenton.
- Then Richard H. Roehler takes the stand.
- He's the chief investigator of the Garden City Police Department. He's the one who took the pictures that revealed the prints of Perry's boot heels.
- He also was the one who photographed the bullet-ridden corpses.
- As the photos are entered into evidence, Dick's father jumps up to protest that Roehler is prejudiced.
- The photographs are passed around to the jury, and they have the intended effect.
- The day's final witness is Floyd Wells, and Dick has a few choice words for him as he walks by.
- Wells testifies about his conversations with Dick about Herb Clutter and his safe.
- He admits he wanted Dick to think that Mr. Clutter had a lot of money, but insists he never believed Dick would do what he said he planned to do—rob the safe and kill the family.
- The defense tries to cast doubt on Wells's credibility—after all, he's been in and out of jail for years for lying and thieving.
- Wells is able to collect the reward for information leading to the capture of the killers.
- He also gets parole for his cooperation, but cue the irony, because we learn that he ended right back up in a Mississippi state prison, serving 30 years for armed robbery.
- The defense attorneys try to argue that their clients' interrogations were aggressive and coercive.
- This totally angers the KBI agents, who know it wasn't true.

- The most damaging witness to the defense was Alvin Dewey, who testified about the gruesome details of Perry's confession to him.
- This is the first time the public has heard about the horrible details.
- He also reveals Perry's statement that Dick had intended to rape Nancy Clutter. This gets Dick's attention.
- He states that Perry had changed his original story and confessed to all the killings, in order to spare Dick's parents the thought that their son was a murderer.
- Hearing that, Mrs. Hickock, who has been struggling to keep her composure during the trial, completely loses it.
- A woman reporter escorts her from the courtroom.
- A distraught Mrs. Hickock tells her that everyone in town has been kind and generous to her, but she can't help but feel they think she's to blame for raising a murderer.
- Many people following the trial are puzzled to see a visitor from Boston—Don Cullivan.
- Perry's lawyer had written to Don to ask if he'd be a character witness for Perry, and Cullivan agreed, out of a religious obligation to try to save Perry's soul.
- The Meiers invite Cullivan for dinner with Perry in his cell. It's quite the spread.
- Perry confesses to Don that he did kill all four victims and wonders why he did it.
- In a climactic statement, he thinks that there were a lot of people in his life who hurt him, and maybe the Clutters were just the ones that ended up paying for it.
- Religious man and reformed convict that he is, Don tries to find out if Perry has any remorse.
- No luck. Perry tells Don that he's not sorry for what he's done; he doesn't feel anything about it.
- In fact, half an hour after the murders, he was laughing at Dick's jokes about the crime.
- Don can't believe anyone could have no remorse about killing someone.
- Perry helpfully points out that soldiers don't lose sleep over killing people; they get medals for it.
- Not to mention the citizens of the county, who can't wait to hang Dick and Perry.
- Cullivan doesn't know what to say.
- Perry's honest and says he can't be hypocritical and pretend to be sorry and ask God for forgiveness when he doesn't believe it.
- He believes that Don, by writing and offering friendship, did more for him than God ever did.
- He says that that he ought to commit suicide right then and there while Don's around rather than die among strangers.
- As the trial resumes, Mr. Hickock maintains his son's innocence.
- He insists that his son wasn't the same after his car accident in 1950.
- The courtroom psychiatrist, Dr. W. Mitchell Jones, takes the stand and says that Dick knew right from wrong when the murders occurred.
- He wasn't allowed to elaborate, because the M'Naghten rule is pretty black and white.
- But we see a sample of his report about Dick that says that brain damage can't be ruled out as a cause of Dick's criminal behavior after his car accident.
- A few ineffective character witnesses are called for Perry.



- Dr. Jones, the psychiatrist, returns to the stand to testify about his opinion about Perry's sanity.
- He states he has no opinion. (Expert witnesses are allowed to have no opinion.)
- That's all he's legally allowed to say.
- But we also get to see his report about Perry, whom he believes has a pretty serious mental illness.
- He describes his paranoid outlook about the world and his constant explosive rage.
- He thinks Perry may suffer from paranoid schizophrenia but would need a more thorough evaluation to determine that.
- That's why he has "no opinion."
- We're treated to excerpts from an article entitled "Murder Without Apparent Motive—A Study in Personality Disorganization" that was written by Dr. Joseph Satten, in consultation with the courtroom psychiatrist Jones, and published in 1960 in *The American Journal of Psychiatry*.
- Satten believes the murders were the fault of Perry Smith.
- He says that people with extreme violence in their childhoods often kill when, in a high state of tension and disorganization, they see the victim-to-be as unconscious representations of their childhood trauma.
- Pretty complex stuff, but the author points out that, in this instance, Perry and the psychiatrist have come to the same conclusion about why he murdered Herbert Clutter.
- Remember what Perry said? The Clutters never hurt him, like other people in his life did. They just had to pay for it.
- In their summation, the prosecution makes a strong case that there's no doubt who killed the Clutter family and no doubt what the punishment should be.
- The defense makes a feeble plea that the death penalty, by murder or by execution, doesn't deter crime and cheapens the value of human life.
- The last person to address the jury is senior trial lawyer Logan Green, who came in to assist the prosecutors and impress his fellow big shots in Garden City. In case they needed more convincing.
- In a dramatic closing statement, he quotes the scriptures about the justice of killing a man who kills another man.
- He points out that in the great state of Kansas, the punishment for murder is hanging.
- He leads the jury through the night of the murders, emphasizing the terror of a family fearing for their lives and the agony of a mother hearing the screams of her children.
- He leaves the verdicts and the sentences to the jurors' consciences.
- Whew.
- Some people think Green's summation was a masterful performance. Others think it was rabble-rousing and melodramatic.
- There's much discussion in the trial audience about the meaning of real justice in this case. Can any human truly be 100 percent evil? Does having a rotten life give a man the license to kill?
- The jury, however, doesn't seem to be conflicted. It takes them just 40 minutes to reach their verdict: both defendants are guilty and sentenced to death.

- Later, in a conversation with an unnamed friend, Josie Meier talks in a flashback about how hard it was to listen to Perry cry in his cell after he heard the verdict, how he held her hand, how sad it was knowing he was going to be killed, and how much his wild pet squirrel misses him.
- Dick and Perry are moved to the Kansas State Penitentiary for Men to wait out their time on Death Row.
- They're scheduled to die one minute after midnight on Friday, May 13, 1960.
- One of their neighbors on death row is Lowell Lee Andrews, an enormous youth of 18 who, after finishing the last chapter of *The Brothers Karamazov*, calmly gunned down his family as they watched television.
- (Try using this story to get out of reading Dostoevsky. It won't work, but it'll be fun.)
- Perry and Dick's execution date passes by, because the Kansas Supreme Court grants them a stay of execution pending their appeals for a new trial.
- Perry goes on a hunger strike because he can't stand being on death row, particularly with that obnoxious Lowell Lee Andrews, who keeps correcting his grammar and acting superior.
- Dick thinks Perry just wants attention, or to be sent to the hospital.
- Perry is delirious much of the summer after being tube-fed during the hunger strike.
- He wakes up to find the warden telling him he got a postcard from his father.
- His father wants the warden to tell him what his son did wrong and asks to visit him. Perry tears up the postcard after reading it.
- He gives up on the hunger strike, deciding he's not going to help anybody kill him.
- Touching.
- Two years of appeals go by.
- Dick spends his time reading lurid novels and law books. Perry daydreams or sleeps all day.
- Mrs. Hickock, now a widow, has visited Dick once a month.
- Two new prisoners arrive, young soldiers convicted of murdering a railroad worker; they boast about having murdered seven others.
- These jolly fellows think you're doing someone a favor by murdering them, because the world sucks.
- Dick continues his letter-writing campaign protesting his innocence, and somebody finally bites.
- Everett Steerman, chairman of the Legal Aid committee of the Kansas State Bar Association, believes Dick's complaint that he and his partner didn't get a fair trial, and they have a new hearing before a judge in Lansing.
- The new lawyers challenge the original ruling on a number of accounts: the jurors were friends of the Clutters; the defense was inadequate; the jurors were biased in favor of the death penalty; it was a hostile trial venue. All the usual objections.
- They succeed in getting a new trial, but after six days, the judge determines that the first trial was fair and the jurors impartial. He upholds the conviction and sentence.
- In the meantime, Lowell Lee Andrew's turn with the hangman arrives on November 30, 1962.
- Dick reflects on how long it took Andrews to die.
- He has to admire Andrews, who never lied about anything he did or didn't do.
- Dick says that everyone else on death row is a bunch of BS artists, and laughingly admits he's one of the worst.

- He thinks that Perry hated Andrews because he had what Perry always wanted—an education.
- He still thinks it's unfair that he'll hang, since he never killed anybody.
- His mother has told him she wants to hear from Perry himself that Dick never pulled the trigger.
- Dick remains a deep thinker, particularly on the subject of capital punishment: "Revenge is all it is, but what's wrong with revenge?"
- Another three years pass.
- New attorneys get the case to the U.S. Supreme Court three times, but all three times the Court refuses to hear the case.
- Finally, on April 14, 1965, the sentence is carried out.
- After entering the gallows chamber, Dick asks if any of the Clutter family are present. They aren't.
- He seems disappointed. We know he approves of revenge.
- Dick forgives and shakes hands with all of his executioners. It takes him 20 minutes to die.
- People are surprised that he took it like a man, not a coward.
- When Perry's turn comes, he states that he's against capital punishment, and maybe, just maybe, he had something to contribute to the world. He apologizes for what he did.
- Dewey said later that he wasn't bothered by watching Hickock hang.
- But Smith, the true killer, seemed like a small, wounded animal, and aroused feelings in Dewey that he couldn't shake.
- Several years after the hangings, Dewey's visiting his mother's grave when he runs into Sue Kidwell.
- She fills him in on what's happened in the past years.
- Bobby Rupp has married another girl; Sue's a junior in college, an art major.
- As Sue hurries off to meet some friends, he thinks of what Nancy Clutter would have looked like now. Then he walks toward home.
- That's it.